

The Corrupt and Elite Animals of Nigeria

Babafemi A. Badejo, Ph.D

There is an irony about Nigeria. One only needs to shout: “thief, thief, thief”, in an attempt to apprehend an alleged petty thief, and in no time, a mob surfaces capture the individual. The alleged thief, whether male or female, is hounded by the mob and receives instant justice, without a trial. In some cases, irrespective of gender, petty thieves are forcibly undressed with accompanying violent kicks and slaps by a blood hungry mob. If the police delay in showing up and/or there is no voice of authority (whether as a result of age or public office) to restrain such mobs, dis-used motor tyres and petrol are procured to deliver instant death penalty without due process on a petty thief.

A petty thief normally snatches jewelry, money, wallets and/or small electronic gadgets like telephones, laptops, etc. The destructive capacity of the petty thief is minimal although it could be of major impact to the Nigerian that is being dispossessed. At times, the process of dispossession by the petty thief could result in minor injuries to his/her victims like wounds from sharp objects. Such wounds could, at times, be life threatening. My wife once sustained such attack as the petty thieves used a knife to continue hitting at her wrist in order to force her to surrender our wedding ring that she was trying to surrender but the finger had grown bigger since the time she acquired the ring. This experience resulted in surgery twice to reconnect nerves that were damaged.

But then, the impact of the stealing by elite thieves permeate the entire society resulting in many deaths on a daily basis. It is easy to think of people occupying decision making positions in the three arms of government when trying to figure out who elite thieves are. At the Executive arm of government, there are petty thieves like the policeman on the roadside collecting as little as 5 cents from motorists just as the elite policemen/women and the top echelons of public servants pervert justice in exchange for the collection of huge sums of money from the highest bidder. The Legislature at the very highest level make laws or avoid to make laws in satisfying vested interests who pay for services rendered in huge material exchanges. And even the chambers of Justice that ought to be hallowed are not free. At the highest level, and in spite of increased salaries and allowances, elite thieves here exchange illicit material gains for justice. However, it would be erroneous to search for elite thieves only in the public services. There are many more elite thieves in our private lives ranging from bank managers collecting part of the loans being sought by customers before disbursement to elites in the religious organizations giving succour to elite thieves through prayers for sale.

Elite thieves have overtime perfected their trade in Nigeria as in many other countries to the extent that people hardly associate deaths of their loved ones with the efforts of elite thieves. They steal at will from the national patrimony and hide the proceeds of such crimes in banks at home and abroad. They bury cash in different places, including burial grounds as well as launder stolen money into real estates and securities of all sorts.

These elite thieves who are actually stealing our countries (Nigeria and many other countries) dry are killing more people per second compared to the collective impact of the actions of petty thieves.

By dipping their respective hands and siphoning from the common purse, elite thieves deny the people, at large, from having so many basics for a reasonable life as expected in society. Whatever they have unlawfully appropriated privately is no longer available to meet the needs of society at large. Diversion of

justice and laws in exchange for material gains equally raise the costs of living and quickens death for many in society at large.

To illustrate, as a result of stealing part of the health budget through corruption, hospitals are, at best, mere consultation clinics attended to by people who are demoralized by the dearth human professional capacities, necessary diagnostic tools, medicines, low salaries and allowances that can retain the best brains in our hospitals. And what's the impact of this, high mother and child mortality rate during births and avoidable deaths as a result of lack of motivation to properly diagnose and or undertake research for the cure of basic illnesses. Even the elites do not escape the poor state of our health situation except that they have access to special hospitals with 24/7 special planes waiting at the tarmac for those who lives are deemed superior because they steal big in collaboration with the contractors. Nigerians know of some of these and they also know that many of our elites are flown abroad to attend to their health.

Countless brains stunting from malnutrition bolstering numbers of living dead is also a result of a few pocketing from the national patrimony. Policies that could have provided nourishment support could not be thought of since elite thieves have depleted the national purse.

The problem is multi-sector and not restricted to health. At the political level, greed and avarice in the struggle to control state apparatus in order to have free hands in cornering wealth results in manipulation of citizenry. The setting of citizens against one another results in conflicts of different scales and deaths.

Some of these manipulations are taking place in a situation in which corruption does not allow effective management of the environment for the realisation of sustainable livelihoods. Hence conflicts from pastoralists and farmers are claiming lives. Unchecked environmental pollution as a result of corruption in managing the affairs of state, is resulting in many diseases and deaths. Different diseases are arising not to talk of incapacity to produce for sustainable livelihoods which in itself results in deaths.

Unnecessary road accidents are taking place as a result of not maintaining the vehicles or allowing decrepit ones to continue to be on the roads once bribes are paid to different uniformed security personnel. The roads, as a result of lack of maintenance are death traps.

Money in the pockets of big men/women thieves are in havens around the world resulting in little or no investments and unemployment persists. Unemployed youths find it easier to organize into bands of armed gangs killing in dispossessing people through armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom or delusory efforts on making money for sustenance through rituals etc.

The armed robbery gangs use guns that were illegally imported and sold to individuals under the table since unlike in the US, Nigeria has no right to bear arms. It is needless to say that security agents, as a result of bribery and corruption turn a blind eye as arms are smuggled and sold.

Money that could have gone into capital investments to create jobs having been siphoned away, many young graduates abhorring joining marauding gangs, embark on dreams to reach Europe. Deaths in the desert and human degradation are followed by slavery and deaths in hostile Libya and if they survive beyond this points, deaths await many in the Mediterranean. Many of the few who reach Europe enter into servitude as illegal immigrants living as third class human beings with little rights in largely hostile countries.

The daily death rate from the actions and inactions of elite corrupt thieves is yet to be adequately measured and reflected.

The endemic nature of corruption in Nigeria is reflected in the annual Transparency International reports. The country continues to be close to the bottom of a survey of all countries in the world since recordings started in 1995.

However, the irony is that instead of the Nigerian mobs reacting in a similar manner as they do with petty thieves, by stoning and lynching elite thieves and shouting thieves on the children of elite thieves at every opportunity, they continue with what the great Fela Anikulapo Kuti in one of his many songs referred to as “suffering and smiling”. It does not end there. Even those who accidentally make it to prison among the elite thieves for stealing are welcomed back into society through rolling out of drums by the docile Nigerians who get unnecessarily over awed by elite thieves even as ex-convicts.

In this process of suffering and smiling, a woman boldly tells an investigation panel over the disappearance of \$100,000 of state money in her care as having been, over time, swallowed by a snake that forays into the vault in which she had kept money.

According to a Nigerian Senator whose colleague could not account for about \$200,000 belonging to an association of sectional Senators—it was a monkey that carted away the sum from the farm of his colleague.

Corruption or elite stealing has become so laughable in Nigeria that the whole country itself is now Nollywood. People laugh off serious matters of thievery with comic relief.

Another day and time, I could elaborate on what could be done about saving the entire country from sustaining the current Nollywood status in the world in the face of elite stealing.